

SVENSKA INSTITUTEN I ATHEN OCH ROM  
INSTITUTUM ATHENIENSE ATQUE INSTITUTUM ROMANUM REGNI SUECIAE

---

# Opuscula

Annual of the Swedish Institutes at Athens and Rome

18  
2025

STOCKHOLM

**EDITORIAL COMMITTEE**

Prof. Henrik Gerding, Lund, Chairman  
Dr Mikael Johansson, Gothenburg, Vice-chairman  
Mrs Marie Grönberg, Stockholm, Treasurer  
Dr Susanne Carlsson, Stockholm, Secretary  
Prof. Gunnar Ekroth, Uppsala  
Dr Therese Emanuelsson-Paulson, Stockholm  
Dr Johan Eriksson, Uppsala  
Dr Ulf R. Hansson, Rome  
Prof. Christer Henriksén, Uppsala  
Dr Jenny Wallensten, Athens  
Mr Julian Wareing, Stockholm  
Dr Lewis Webb, Gothenburg

**EDITOR**

Dr Julia Habetzeder

**SECRETARY'S & EDITOR'S ADDRESS**

Department of Archaeology and Classical Studies  
Stockholm University  
106 91 Stockholm, Sweden  
secretary@ecsi.se | editor@ecsi.se

**DISTRIBUTOR**

Eddy.se AB  
Box 1310  
621 24 Visby, Sweden

For general information, see <https://ecsi.se>

For subscriptions, prices and delivery, see <https://ecsi.bokorder.se>

Published with the aid of a grant from The Swedish Research Council (2023-00215)

The English text was revised by Rebecca Montague, Hindon, Salisbury, UK

The text of this work is licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence (CC BY 4.0). To view a copy of this licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>. All figures are reproduced with the permission of the rights holders acknowledged in captions. The figures are expressly excluded from the CC BY license covering the text; they may not be reproduced, copied, transmitted, or manipulated without consent from the owners, who reserve all rights.

*Opuscula* is a peer reviewed journal. Contributions to *Opuscula* should be sent to the Secretary of the Editorial Committee before 1 November every year. Contributors are requested to include an abstract summarizing the main points and principal conclusions of their article. For style of references to be adopted, see <https://ecsi.se>.

ISSN 2000-0898

ISBN 978-91-977799-7-5

© Svenska institutet i Athen and Svenska institutet i Rom

Printed by PrintBest (Viljandi, Estonia) via Italgraf Media AB (Stockholm, Sweden) 2025

Cover illustration from Susan M. Dixon in this volume, p. 252, fig. 5. Cover illustration edited by Julia Habetzeder.

## Book reviews

Z. Pitz, *Le Bestiaire sacrificiel dans les normes rituelles grecques* (Kernos Supplément 43), Liège: Presses universitaires de Liège 2024. 322 pp. ISBN: 978-2-87562-414-7.  
<https://doi.org/10.30549/opathrom-18-11>

Despite the substantial number of scholarly works published annually on ancient Greek sacrifice, numerous aspects of the topic remain largely unexplored and open to fruitful investigation. Among these is the focus of Zoé Pitz's book, based on her Ph.D. dissertation defended in 2019 at the University of Liège, which deals with the associations between sacrificial animals and divinities in Greek ritual norms (formerly known as "sacred laws"), an "*angle mort des recherches sur le sacrifice grec*" (p. 15) that had never been systematically explored before.

After a preface and introduction, the book is organized into two interconnected parts and ends with a brief concluding section, followed by two appendices, a list of figures and tables, a list of abbreviations, a bibliography, and an extensive set of indices.

In the introduction, which is admirably to the point, the aims, frameworks, methodology and structure of the study are presented. The overall scope is to understand the reasons that led the Greeks to select specific animals, according to the divine recipient and the context of the sacrifice, to honour one or more deities. For this purpose, various factors are considered, ranging from the characteristics of the sacrificial animals and the divinities' profiles and mythical histories to more concrete aspects such as communities' finances. The analysis is exclusively focused on Greek ritual norms, examining inscriptions from across the ancient Greek world dating from the late 6th century BC to the end of the 2nd century AD.

The first part of the book, 'Les critères de sélection des animaux sacrificiels', explores the four primary criteria for selecting sacrificial animals (species, sex, age and colour). Due to the extensive size of the analysed corpus, the data are presented in the form of graphs. Each chapter examines the epigraphically attested terminology for each selection criterion, accom-

panied by useful tables with translations in French and English, and presents the associations between sacrificial animals and divine recipients, also considering the chronological and geographical frameworks of each sacrifice. Close associations between certain types of sacrificial animals and particular deities, as well as the over- or under-representation of particular animals in chronological or geographical contexts, are determined through statistical analyses (by comparing "*effectif théorique*" and "*effectif réel*", pp. 39–40).

The investigation begins, in chapter 1, by exploring the occurrences of four animal species (bovine, ovine, caprine and porcine) and "generic animals" (animals designated by terms not specifying their species). Sheep are the most commonly sacrificed animals, followed by cattle, which represent more costly and prestigious offerings, while goats and pigs are offered in sacrifice less frequently. Certain deities are more closely associated with particular animal species, such as Athena and Zeus with cattle and sheep, respectively, and Demeter and Kore with pigs. The preference for a particular animal species could also vary by region, with bovines prevalent in Athens and goats frequently attested at Phyxia and Erchia.

Chapter 2 is focused on the sex of the sacrificial animals. Pitz shows that, although not an absolute rule, the choice of a male or a female animal is usually determined by the sex of the divine recipient. An exception to this pattern is the goddess Kore, who regularly receives male animals.

Chapter 3 examines animal age as a criterion for selection. By distinguishing between adult and young animals, the analysis primarily focuses on the latter, as adult animals are regarded as "standard" offerings. Among the deities, only Dionysos and Kouroutrrophos show a statistically notable association with the sacrifice of young animals (however, see discussion of chapter 7 below).

In the short chapter 4 it is observed that indications of the colour of the sacrificial animals are rare. This criterion therefore appears to be less significant than the others. From the collect-

ed evidence, no specific association can be identified between certain divine recipients and certain animal colours. Interestingly, black animals could be sacrificed to divinities other than those designated as “chthonian” (e.g., Zeus *Chthonios*), thus confirming the inadequacy of the traditional scholarly dichotomy of white animals—“Olympian” rituals/black animals—“chthonian” rituals.

Based on the data presented in the first part, the second part of the book, ‘Associations “divinités – animaux”: des lignes de force?’, delves into the underlying trends in the selection process of sacrificial animals by analysing three themes, each corresponding to one selection criterion previously explored: species, sex and age.

In chapter 5, which addresses the question “sacrificing a sheep or a goat?”, the focus is on the rationale for selecting one species over the other. The choice between sheep and goats is examined as a case study since these two species are generally equivalent in price. Financial considerations cannot, therefore, be invoked to justify the choice of one over the other, as would be the case in explaining the selection of a sheep rather than a bovine. The investigation looks at the cults of Dionysos, Apollo and Zeus, with particular emphasis on the calendars of Erchia and Phyxia. The combination of aspects, such as breeding practices and the identities of the divine recipients, probably affected the choice between sheep or goats. However, the analysis ultimately reveals that, in many cases, the available documentation is not sufficient to evaluate all the factors influencing the choice or to draw definitive conclusions. Pitz takes this lack of result as an opportunity to make two significant methodological remarks. First, the necessity of avoiding overinterpretations of fragmentary evidence is emphasized. Second, as the configurations at Erchia and Phyxia differ, the importance of carefully contextualizing sacrificial rituals and avoiding generalizations is highlighted.

In chapter 6, Pitz delves into the sex of sacrificial animals. After stating that the reasons for exceptions to the norm of sex alignment between animal and divine recipient often escape us, she focuses on the rationale behind the sacrifices of pregnant females and uncastrated males. The analysis reveals that Demeter is not the only divinity receiving pregnant females, and that all cults involving these animals are linked to vegetal fertility or human fecundity. Such ritual offering establishes an analogy between the fertility of the animal and the expectations of the communities in these matters. Regarding uncastrated males, which are closely associated with Kore and Poseidon, the configurations are more varied. Within the cults of Kore, uncastrated males represent the notions of fertility and fecundity, similar to pregnant females offered to Demeter. The case of Poseidon is different, as he is presumably associated with uncastrated males as the “male god par excellence”.

Finally, chapter 7 addresses the reasons behind the sacrifices of young animals, examining three case studies: piglets

as preliminary offerings, young animals in the calendar of Erchia, and young animals in the cults of Dionysos. In most cases, the choice of young animals appears to be driven by the type of ritual performed rather than by the identity of the divine recipients. Due to their small size and affordability, young animals are particularly suitable for preliminary offerings and the holocausts documented at Erchia. As a result, the association between young animals and Kourotrophos, presented in chapter 3, is reconsidered, as most young animals for this goddess are sacrificed as preliminary offerings. Only Dionysos exhibits a close association with young animals, and the author suggests that such offerings might fit well with the god’s profile, as he is often represented as an effeminate young man.

Pitz’s study stands out for its methodological rigour and clarity of presentation. Each chapter includes a concluding section in which the main findings are precisely summarized. The introduction and the general conclusion engage in a dialogue, effectively framing the richness of the investigation. Furthermore, one of the strengths of the book lies in its structure: the first part thoroughly surveys sacrificial animals and their associations with divine recipients, while the second part constitutes a comprehensive interpretation, looking into the underlying reasons behind the selection of the sacrificial animals.

Navigating between general trends and local particularities, the author, through the lens of the selection of sacrificial animals, accounts for the complexity of sacrificial practices in light of the plurality of deities and cults within Greek religion, as well as the geographical fragmentation of the Greek world. At the same time, she systematically highlights the more concrete dimensions surrounding the associations between sacrificial animals and divine recipients, ranging from financial aspects to animal breeding practices.

There is no doubt that Pitz’s *Le Bestiaire sacrificiel* will serve as a key reference for scholars of ancient Greek society, providing a comprehensive resource for consulting information on sacrificial animals and their divine recipients in Greek ritual norms. As the author herself notes in the conclusion (p. 279), it is to be hoped that the trends she highlights will lay the groundwork for further research on the selection of sacrificial animals, an essential theme for achieving a better understanding of Greek sacrifice. For instance, a line of research directly prompted by the publication of this book could involve a similarly systematic and methodologically rigorous investigation into the associations between sacrificial animals and divinities in literary sources, with the ultimate aim of comparing literary and epigraphic evidence.

FILIPPO LEPORI

Department of Archaeology, Ancient History and Conservation  
Uppsala University  
Box 626  
751 26 Uppsala, Sweden  
filippo.lepori@antiken.uu.se